

Tightening the Reins

How Khamenei Makes Decisions

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Mehdi Khalaji, a Qom-trained Shiite theologian, was the Libitzky Family Fellow at The Washington Institute.



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This new study by Mehdi Khalaji focuses on explaining the decisionmaking process within Iran's highest political echelon.

When at age fifty Ali Khamenei, a middle-ranking cleric, was named Ayatollah Khomeini's successor as the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader, he lacked not only his forerunner's charisma but his religious and political credentials as well. Gradually, however, over nearly two and a half decades, Khamenei has accumulated formidable centralized authority, aided by transformation of the IRGC's role in overseeing the country's politics and economy. He now enjoys the final say on many issues, especially when it comes to foreign policy and the nuclear issue. Ironically, a leader once seen as an inadequate successor to Khomeini may now have accumulated more power than the first Supreme Leader, at least in some areas.

This new study by Mehdi Khalaji focuses on explaining the decisionmaking process within Iran's highest political echelon. Setting aside the notion of the Supreme Leader as omnipotent, certain realities and actors can affect his mindset and decisions, but until now, few studies have examined these contingencies with regard to either Khamenei or Khomeini. Practically speaking, a better understanding of the subtleties that drive the Supreme Leader's actions and behavior can help U.S. and other leaders craft a more effective approach to the regime, particularly in light of its emerging nuclear capability.

THE AUTHOR

Mehdi Khalaji is a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, focusing on the politics of Iran and Shiite groups in the Middle East. ❖

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